

Some reflections on the NCC “police-free future” session

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd killing](#) October 19, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

The 2020 NCC Peace and Social Justice Conference

Police-Free Future panel, October 15, 2020 video

So Gadfly was instinctively inimical to the idea of abolishing the police, especially as it was sugar-coated in the conference session title as a “police-free future.”

But he was curious.

And eager to hear on what basis you could justify such an extreme idea.

And what put in its place.

He has slow-walked you (and him) through 7 posts in which the case was made (well, as much as you can do in a few conference minutes).

Herewith some Gadfly reflections:

- Gadfly was glad one of the presenters, the one he has focused on so far (we’ll pick up Lehigh Valley’s Ashleigh Strange later), was, though not local, actually working in the abolition trenches.
- Abolition — a police-free future — was not an academic or theoretical exercise for Peter VanKoughnett from Minneapolis; it was his primary work.
- This will surprise you, perhaps — Gadfly was **surprised** he was not a person of color.
- Peter was not only the whitest of white, he seemed very young, almost too young, and he exhibited a kind of vulnerability in manner

— for instance, remarking how complicated the issues are, how humbled he felt at the complexity, how at times he had doubts regarding what he was representing.

- Gadfly’s mental stereotype of “the” male bomb-throwing abolitionist was busted.
- Peter did not “argue” — there was a softness, a halting tentativeness to his delivery.
- Cynical Gadfly wondered if that was a strategy to disarm his audience, but, truth be told, the majority of the audience, unlike Gadfly, already leaned toward accepting abolition or something close to it and were looking for models and strategies to implement here.
- Peter was pretty much preaching to the choir.
- Also **surprising** to Gadfly was that the move toward abolition grew out of an in-depth study, grew out of a history of policing in Minneapolis from the very beginning — 150 years ago.
- In other words, again — though no doubt Peter’s group is allied to national movements — the reason for advocating abolition of policing in Minneapolis was not academic or theoretical. (Nor just being “hip,” as he said.)
- It was solidly rooted in a place. It was site-specific. It was organic. It was reality.
- The drive for abolition in Minneapolis grows out of Minneapolis history.
- It is not imposed on Minneapolis, not layered on from the outside.
- Gadfly has read the 2017 MPD150 report entitled **“Enough is Enough.”**
- That Minneapolis police history is ugly.
- As one of Peter’s slides indicates, the Minneapolis Police Department is under state investigation for civil rights abuses.
- And newspaper reports post-GeorgeFloyd indicate Minneapolis City Council members not part of the abolitionist movement using precisely abolitionist language.

- Not only using it, but acting on it in ways — proposing radical reconstruction of public safety, that is — that Gadfly has **reported on before**.
- City Council came on abolition on its own, saying, in effect, enough is enough.
- In other words, this policing system is unmistakably rotten, attempts to rehab it over time have failed, it's not worth patching, and therefore it clearly needs to be scrapped.
- MPD150's **futility cycle** grows out of historical analysis; it is no fabrication or fantasy.
- Enough is enough. The last straw.
- Gadfly gets it; abolition makes sense for Minneapolis.
- A third **surprise** for Gadfly is that abolition doesn't mean *immediate* abolition as the word seems to suggest and as fearful critics have envisioned.
- Abolition is a process. Perhaps “devolving” or “phasing out” the police department would be a better term. Anarchy is not going to reign all of a sudden.
- But supposing a legitimacy for abolition in Minneapolis raises the question Gadfly has raised for us **several times**.
- What's the situation in Bethlehem?
- “Has trust between the police department and the community broken down in Bethlehem?”
- From public commentary so far, Gadfly would have to say the answer is no.
- And if that trust is not broken, if the police department history is not a trainwreck, then certainly abolition will find no roots here.
- (Hmmm, parenthetically, a Bethlehem Moment on the inception of our police department seems to be in order.)
- We in Bethlehem may be in a mood to talk, if at all, about some reform but not about replacement.
- So, now knowing more about it, Gadfly's thinking has enlarged to accept abolition in certain “enough is enough” circumstances but not as a general principle.

What are you thinking?